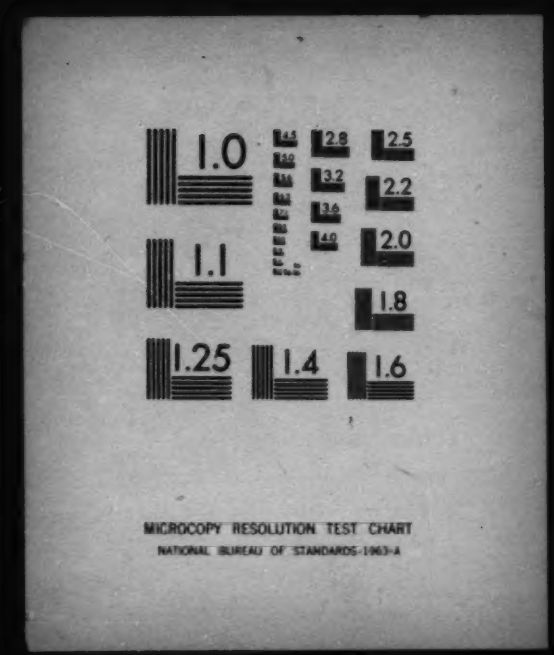
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MASTERPIECE

Treasures from the Collection
of The Royal Photographic Society
Arts Council 1971-72

The Royal Photog[illegible]ic Society possesses one of the world's finest c[illegible]lections of photographs. Although the collec[illegible]on was established early in this century, it is particularly rich in nineteenth-century material. The Arts Council is extremely grateful to the Society for making this selection of original photographs available for a twelve-months tour of Great Britain.

We are also indebted to Aaron Scharf, Professor of Art History at the Open University, who, with the assistance of Tim Benton, Lecturer in Art History, also at the Open University, selected the exhibition and prepared the catalogue.

Much valuable help and advice was forthcoming at all stages from The Royal Photographic Society and in particular from Margaret Harker, Chairman of their Collection Advisory Committee.

Norbert Lynton
Director of Exhibitions
Arts Council of Great Britain

The Royal Photographic Society Permanent Collection

One suspects that we are on the verge of a quite spectacular outburst of interest in the history of photography and source material. Over the past fifteen years old photographs and photographic equipment have acquired a value. The auction of photographs and apparatus at Geneva in 1954 was probably the turning point. Material which had previously been acquired for nothing but the cost of a journey or for a nominal sum was sold at significant prices. The era in which old photographs have acquired a value has arrived. Whole collections, when they come on the market, now realise large sums of money. Both the Gernsheim and Sipley collections come to mind in this connection – the former being acquired by the University of Texas and the latter by a large commercial organisation with interests in photography – both in the United States of America.

Two years ago the Council of The Royal Photographic Society decided to obtain a valuation of its very valuable collection, which includes books, documents, photographs and equipment, for insurance purposes. At the time large parts of the Collection were inaccessible as the Society was housed in temporary premises. However the rare books, documents and a fair proportion of the photographs were assessed by Sotheby's at £68,000. Another expert, with specialised knowledge in the collection of photographs and associated material, considers this too low a figure. As with any other collection material value is largely determined by supply and demand, together with basic intrinsic value. However, it seems certain that the value attached to old photographs and rare books on photography is bound to increase so that those who had the foresight to gather this material many years ago are in an advantageous position, provided it has been carefully stored under safe conditions.

I hope in the near future to publish my survey of collections of photographs as I have been encouraged to believe that it could prove useful for reference purposes. It was certainly a most interesting project. Several factors emerged, for instance a more advanced and sophisticated stage has been reached in the USA in respect of collections of photographs than is the case in Britain and other European countries. Although many of the European collections were founded much earlier, with a few outstanding exceptions – mainly museum collections showing the technical development of photography and featuring equipment and processes rather than the art of photography – there has not been the finance available or the interest taken to produce impressive results.

Another interesting factor is that collections have been formed with very different aims in view. Some of the largest, earliest and historically most significant collections are concerned with photographs as documents. Usually in these instances photographs are associated with lithographs, drawings, maps and all other forms of visual illustrative material which can add useful information to our knowledge on all manner of subjects. These collections are not designed to record the history and development of photography. However it is with this latter classification that most photographers will be primarily interested.

One of the major problems connected with collections of photographs is that of archival impermanence. The carbon and platinum printing processes are very attractive in this respect because of the image stability inherent in the processes in terms of permanence under satisfactory storage conditions. The fading of prints made by both earlier and later processes and the deterioration of daguerrotypes and other photographic images is a matter for considerable concern. The known impermanence of present day colour printing processes has adversely affected the collecting of colour photography, which will constitute a most regrettable gap in the history of photography archives of the mid and late twentieth century.

In some collections which are concerned with the history and development of photography the material is confined to the nineteenth century and does not extend beyond 1914. In others (the most noted example being the Museum of Modern Art, New York) the major interest is in the twentieth century and sums of money are regularly devoted to the acquisition of material by young 'up and coming' photographers. In these latter instances collecting becomes a much more speculative art and much will depend on the taste af the curator and his ability to recognise outstanding and lasting

qualities in the work presented. The collection of work of historical significance is another matter and calls for more easily defined knowledge and experience on the part of the curator, his ability to ferret it out and the allocation of sufficient funds to meet the expense involved.

Moving from generalisations to the particular, the growing interest in The Royal Photographic Society's Collections is being encouraged but there are problems of organisation which have to be faced and overcome before the Collections are readily accessible to researcher and students. Finance, normally at the heart of such a matter, has to be made available in order to establish the necessary organisation and maintenance, for the Society does not have funds available to develop the Collection as it deserves or to offer the service which is now required.

There is some wonderful and exciting material in the RPS Collections. Included is an impressive and invaluable collection of one of the earliest pioneers of photography, William Henry Fox-Talbot, who made the negative–positive process a reality. The RPS has three copies of his limited edition of 'The Pencil of Nature', one of which (possibly the only remaining one) is complete. These books contain original photographs, the prints having been made at Fox Talbot's establishment at Reading. The collection also includes books, letters, other documents as well as many of his photographs, cameras and other items of equipment.

The RPS Collection is rich in respect of nineteenth-century material, especially photographs taken in the early days. Probably the most complete collection of the work of Roger Fenton is to be found here and includes fine examples of his portrait, architectural, landscape and museum photography in addition to his better known photographs taken during the Crimean War. There are albums containing exquisite work by Francis Frith, Maxime du Camp, Bisson Freres and others of the 1850s who photographed archaeological sites, architecture and were official photographers to expeditions of an exploratory nature. The collection of the work of Julia Margaret Cameron numbers over 400 prints and could be the most comprehensive collection of her work in any public or private collection. The photographers Robinson, Rejlander, Davison, Emerson, and others who sought to establish photography as an art form in the last century are well represented. Photographs by many of the most distinguished photographers at the turn of the century: Stieglitz, Steichen, Coburn, Evans, White, Kasebier, Craig Annan and others, are to be found in the Collections as well as the complete series of 'Camera Work' – Stieglitz's famous publication.

The Royal Photographic Society's Collection was established by J. Dudley Johnston (a former past-President, and one time Honorary Secretary and Honorary Curator), and founded on his own personal collections, all acquisitions taking the form of gifts and bequests. In the early years of his association with the Society (approx. 1910-25) D.J. established many valuable contacts in photographic circles in America and Europe as well as in Britain, which led to the exchange of material for exhibition and collection. Largely because of these contacts the Collections are broadly representative of aesthetic and technical developments in Photography up to the 1920s, although the emphasis is naturally centred on this country. From 1920 onwards, through gifts and bequests, material of all kinds (books, photographs, letters and equipment) came to the Society and has been added to the Collection. In the instances where material was acquired deliberately this was done mainly through exhibitions organised by the Society, the concentration being inward rather than outward looking and with the accent on the collection of examples of pictorial photography. In this way some of the major aesthetic developments in photography in the mid-twentieth century are inadequately represented. The present policy is an exciting one and seeks to supplement the very valuable past with additional material whenever this comes to hand. Moreover, efforts will be made to fill some of the mid-century gaps as is appropriate. Also a close watch is being kept on present day photography and possible future developments. Two substantial acquisitions have been added during the last six months, being some of the best work of two eminent British professional photographers recently deceased.

Margaret F. Harker F.I.I.P., Hon. F.R.P.S., Hon. B.K.S.T.S., D.G.Ph., Chairman of the Collection Advisory Committee of The Royal Photographic Society.

David Octavius Hill (1802-1870) & Robert Adamson (1820-1848)

Miss McCandlish c. 1843/5

Between 1843 and 1847 Hill and Adamson made more than 1500 photographs. The method used was the calotype. The technique is aesthetically significant for the calotype's soft, luminous appearance is due largely to the fact that the negative was made on paper of which the fibrous substance was transmitted to the print. The choice of medium seems deliberate and dictated by Hill's and Adamson's preference for chiaroscuro and Rembrandtesque effects. Contemporaries, lavishing praise on these photographs, compared them approvingly with the works of the most famous portrait painters of the past.

Adamson began to take photographs in 1842 at the age of 22, his talent in the medium immediately recognised. It was at this point that Hill, a painter with a large commemorative portrait commission on hand calling for almost 450 likenesses, turned to photography as an appropriate vehicle for reducing his labours. He entered into a partnership with the young Adamson in 1843. Their portraits of distinguished men and women of Scottish society far transcend the immediate needs of Hill's painting. Their subjects included genre scenes taken in fishing villages and architectural views. Hill was a reputable landscape painter, yet curiously, we can only account for a few dozen landscape photographs by the two partners. When Adamson died in 1848, Hill at once suspended his photographic activities until the 1850s, and in the '60s in collaboration with a Glasgow photographer he took up the camera again.

Though with Adamson's equipment, portraits of life size could be produced, the difficulties of preparing large paper plates, plus the increased time required to expose them, made it expedient to reduce the size. Most of the Hill and Adamson portraits, contact printed, measure about 15×21 cm. (6×8 inches). The colours of the original prints are in several shades of sepia due to variations in the control of the technique. Prints made from the same negative are unique and will vary in colour and quality at least as much as in different states of etchings. Those shown in the exhibition are photogravure prints made from the original negatives in 1905 by the Scottish photographer J. Craig Annan and largely account for the revival of Hill's and Adamson's reputation at the beginning of this century.

David Octavius Hill

Roger Fenton (1819-1869)

Fruit and Flowers c. 1853/60

Fenton, like Hill, was a painter before taking up the camera. His canvases were hung in the Royal Academy Exhibitions between 1849 and 1851. He was trained in the early 1840s in the studio of Paul Delaroche in Paris, notable for the large number of its students who later distinguished themselves as photographers. The superb quality of many early photographs may well be due to the fact that so many photographers were in the first place trained as painters.

Fenton's reputation is based principally on his memorable photographs of the Crimean War. He made there over 300 large collodion glass plate negatives in the stifling heat and hazardous conditions of the battlefield during the summer of 1855.

But it is not commonly known that Fenton's photographic activities extended to several other subjects as well. He is to be credited with a striking set of informal photographs of the Royal family, with landscape and architectural views, still-lifes, city and river views and exotic 'orientalist' costume pieces.

From about 1847, he was active in promoting photography and in large part was responsible for the establishment, in 1853, of the Photographic Society of London (now the Royal Photographic Society). He became its first Secretary.

Roger Fenton

Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813-1875)

The Two Ways of Life 1857

Rejlander came to England from Sweden in the 1840s, establishing himself in 1855 at Wolverhampton and later in London as a portrait painter and photographer. He is one of the best-known of the early pictorialists ('High Art' photographers). His *chef-d'oeuvre* is a large and elaborate photographic composition called *The Two Ways of Life*, a moral allegory which took him six weeks to complete. Shown at the gigantic Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857 it provoked heated debate but its decorum was established when Queen Victoria purchased a copy for her Consort, Prince Albert.
Impugned to this very day for competing with painting and 'perverting' the 'true role' of photography, Rejlander produced many other pictorial compositions, often using unorthodox masking and multiple-printing methods. Their titles, like those of paintings in the Royal Academy exhibitions at the time, convey some of the character of the work: *The Disciple, The Godess Nicotina* (a warning to smokers), *Slaves make Tyrants, Photography Receiving a Fee from the Painter, Take care of your Complexion,* as examples.

Portrait photography and nude studies for artists rather than 'High Art' photography earned Rejlander a living, and his less known pictures of street-life have been praised for their naturalness. Rejlander's photographs of children interested Charles Darwin who used them in preference to drawings to illustrate (with the required accuracy) his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).

Oscar Gustave Rejlander

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879)

Sweet Liberty (also called the Mountain Nymph) 1870

At the age of 48, Julia Margaret Cameron had photography thrust upon her almost by accident. Retired with her husband from government service in India, where she was born, they finally settled down in the Isle of Wight. In 1863, to offer her some means of diversion, one of her children presented her with a camera. Completely self-taught, Mrs Cameron was uninhibited by the conventions which in some degree determine the character of an artist's or a photographer's work. She threw herself into photography with great enthusiasm and produced some of the finest portrait studies yet known in that medium. Friend and neighbour of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, she thus gained access to many noteworthy dignitaries of the Victorian era, several of whom posed before her camera: Sir John Herschel, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Charles Darwin, Ellen Terry and Tennyson himself. Yet among her most compelling portraits are those of her own relatives, friends, servants, and their children. Artists like George Frederick Watts greatly admired the soft tonal, even out-of-focus effects of her photographs, despairing of ever being able to equal them in painting. The painter, André Derain's comment, on being shown Julia Cameron's portraits about 1905, is revealing: 'It is the perfection of the camera that has spoiled everything'.

Julia Cameron did not confine herself to portraits. In keeping with the taste of the time, she produced a small number of subject pictures as well, most notably photographic prints for Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, a synthetic though charming series illustrating the famous Victorian romance.

Julia Margaret Cameron

Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901)

Fading Away 1858

'Combination printing' was the term used to describe the montage technique of the composite photographic compositions produced by Robinson. He was convinced that the photographer was capable of expressing himself as well in any genre as the painter. There was no lack of poetry in photography. Like Rejlander, he went through the most elaborate preparations in evolving his pictures. For his tragic deathbed scene, *Fading Away* (1858), he combined five negatives, and he informs us that the central figure had to practice expression for three years before the approriate photograph could be taken. Prince Albert was so impressed with the picture that he issued a blanket order for a copy of every composite photograph Robinson subsequently produced.

Robinson, trained as a painter, sometimes made preliminary pencil sketches in preparation for photographs. No technical means were spared in their execution. His procedures were held in contempt by many purist-minded photographers at the time. But he insisted that any dodge, trick, and conjuration, may be used by the photographer, so long as he avoids the mean, bare and ugly, and elevates his subject.

With a portrait studio in Leamington established in 1857, he was an active member of the Photographic Society and a regular contributor to its exhibitions. In 1887 he became its Vice-President.

Robinson's work, despite the criticisms, was enormously popular and he became, through the publication of several influential books on photography, as well as through his pictures, the foremost pictorial photographer of the last half of the 19th century.

Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936)

A Suffolk Dyke c. 1886

For the first time in the history of photography, a genuine and furious debate was initiated concerning the aesthetic role of the photographer. Emerson's zealous speech to the London Camera Club in 1886, and then his controversial book, *Naturalistic Photography*, which first appeared three years later, put the cat among the pigeons. As a theoretician Emerson had flaws, but as a polemicist he was superb.

Trained as a doctor and enamoured of scientific theory, his naturalism was based on physiological optics, that in fact being the title of a well-known book by Hermann von Helmholtz which exerted at least as strong an influence on Emerson as it probably had on Neo-Impressionist painters like Georges Seurat. The photographer should imitate the effects of nature on the eye, as did the great painters of the past, said Emerson. One of these effects, he supposed, was that in focusing the vision on the central area, the periphery tended to blur. So, to get what one really saw, the lens should be put slightly out of focus, though not obtrusively. 'In this mingled decision and indecision [he wrote], this lost and found, lies all the charm and mystery of nature'.

Emerson fulminated against the aesthetic insensitivity of overall sharpness in photography.

But his real *bête noir* was the synthetic and artificial pictorialism of photographers like H. P. Robinson whose book, *Pictorial Effect in Photography* he called, 'the quintessence of literary fallacies and art anachronisms'.

Emerson's call for a return to nature was based on the models of Millet and Corot, the painters of Barbizon, and he urged photographers to see the works of these and other 'Impressionists' then on view in London. As the Barbizon painters found peasant life in the Fontainebleau forest a congenial subject, so Emerson too discovered a rustic simplicity and charm in the Fenland and Broads of East Anglia. He published several portfolios of photographs on East Anglian life, reproduced by the permanent methods of platinotype and photogravure – notably 40 platinum prints called *Life and Landscape on the Norfolk Broads* (1886). The silvery, matt finish of these platinotype prints is the result of fine particules of metallic platinum embedded in the fibres of the paper.

Volatile by nature, in 1891 Emerson did a complete *volte-face* as a result of his discussions with 'a great painter'. He renounced photography as an art, despairing of its limitations, its inhibitions on the creativity of the artist, and ceased to practice it. Nevertheless, he had fostered a new school of naturalistic photographers which carried on his principles without him.

Frank Meadows Sutcliffe (1859-1940)

Fishermen

Just as P. H. Emerson discovered something valuable in the simple rural life of East Anglia, so did Sutcliffe, under Emerson's influence, find his 'Barbizon' in the fishing folk and farmers around Whitby on the Yorkshire coast. He opened a photographic portrait studio there in 1875, but his first love was for land and sea scapes and genre. In the 1880s and '90s he produced a large number of photographs, many of them, like Emerson's, in platinotype, and most others as carbon prints in sepia tones. His subjects tell us of the life of Whitby at the time: mending nets, baiting hooks, mud and cinder barges working out of Whitby harbour, open air fish markets, itinerant tradesmen, farmyard studies and harvesting scenes. Many of his seascapes, with strong *contre-jour* effects recall early romantic paintings of similar subjects. A milkmaid resembles a painting by Corot or Millet. Sutcliffe's father was a water-colour painter and may well have directed his son to certain subjects.

Like Emerson, Sutcliffe worked with a whole plate camera ($6\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ inches) and collodion on glass negatives. But unlike Emerson, who shunned posing or any synthetic means, Sutcliffe seems to have arranged his subjects – though to look natural.

Sutcliffe was active in photographic affairs in the 1890s being a founding member (in 1892) of the Linked Ring, a brotherhood of internationally well-known photographers who were hostile to the policies of the Photographic Society, and who established their own, and immensely successful, Salon of photography.

Sutcliffe's photographs are now carefully preserved in the museum of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society with which he was associated, having become, in 1923, curator of the museum. In 1966, when an exhibition of his photographs was held in Whitby, many of his subjects, a few of them still living, were identified.

Frederick Henry Evans (1852-1943)

A Sea of Steps (Wells) 1900

Evans is best known for his photographs of English cathedrals and for his exquisite portrait of Aubrey Beardsley. It was he, it is said, who first encouraged Beardsley to become an illustrator. A bookseller in the City of London, Evans had taken up photography as an amateur in 1882. In the early '90s his work included the portraits of many literary and artistic acquaintances. His cathedral series was begun in 1896, and probably because of their success (they were sold as lantern slides as well as prints) he turned professionally to photography in 1898. Lincoln Cathedral was first taken by Evans in 1898; Wells from 1900. He received many commissions from *Country Life*, for whom he photographed famous old châteaux in France.

Evans became one of the *avant-garde* photographers joined together as the Linked Ring. His approach was a purist, a 'straight' one, avoiding all the soft-focus semblances of 'impressionism' encouraged by Emerson. Unlike some of his colleagues in the Linked Ring he shunned all manipulative printing processes. He rejected any graphic means for producing his prints, the results of photo-etching and hand-photogravure being too far removed from the crispness of his original conceptions. He preferred platinum prints and their silvery grey or sepia tones. So completely did he believe in the efficacy of his technique that when platinum paper became unavailable after the first world war, he gave up photography.

Frederick Henry Evans

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946)

Winter – New York 1898

More, probably, than any other photographer in this century, Stieglitz promoted the idea of a common cause between photography and the other visual arts. Obsessively concerned with the elevation of photography into a new artistic sphere, and hostile to tradition, he was very effective in making the *avant-garde* both in photography and art known to the American public. One of his significant achievements was the formation in 1902 of 'Photo-Secession', a group of talented dissidents consciously responsive to similar secessionist movements in art. Their famous gallery, called '291' was opened at that address in Fifth Avenue New York City in 1905. There, not only were the works of contemporary photographers shown, but those also of Picasso, Picabia, Matisse, Rodin, Toulouse-Lautrec and others. Never before had there been such a harmonious correspondence between photographers, painters and sculptors. At '291' some of the first exhibitions of African sculpture and children's art were held. Later, at '291', American Dada was initiated. From 1903-17 Stieglitz produced the splendid, and undoubtedly the best photographic magazine ever known: *Camera Work*. Among its contributors were G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, Gertrude Stein and Maurice Maeterlinck. In the forefront of all these activities was the indefatigable Stieglitz.

Stieglitz made his first photographs in the 1880s. In 1892 he began, quite deliberately out of aesthetic preference, to use the hand-camera, taking street scenes in New York and Paris. Influenced by Impressionism, his subjects are evoked in the atmospheric conditions of rain, snow, smoke and steam. He tolerated the greatest discomforts in hopes that the right image would eventually appear. 'My picture, "Fifth Avenue, Winter" [he wrote], is the result of a three hours' stand during a fierce snow-storm . . . awaiting the proper moment.' In the '90s he often used lantern slides as an effective means for showing his prints.

His early negatives were made expressly for enlargements, and he rarely used more than a part of the original in making his prints. Later, however, using a 4 × 5 inch graphlex, he made only contact prints which he called 'equivalents'. Some of these 'equivalents' are in the form of cloud studies, executed in the early '20s. These he did for a special reason. When the success of his portraits were attributed to some kind of unconscious hypnotic power which he was believed to exert on his sitters, rather than to his more conscious creative abilities, he took to photographing clouds to show that even through such impersonal forms he could make his philosophy of life known.

Alfred Stieglitz

Clarence Hudson White (1871-1925)

Interior with Figure 1899

Born in Ohio, White began to explore photography in 1894, first using a 4 × 5 inch view camera with a 6 inch lens, then later a larger one. Among his earliest photographs were genre scenes, their soft tones the result of taking them in early morning before going to work. His first recognition came in 1896, although he was criticised then for his tonal unorthodoxies and for photographing against the light.

In 1898 he exhibited with Stieglitz in the Philadelphia Salon, his work praised by critics.

In 1899 he showed in London. Stieglitz invited him that year to join the Camera Club of New York.

In 1902 he became one of the founder members of Photo-Secession.

In his portraits and landscapes especially, the deep, Chiaroscuro effects produce an unreal and dreamlike quietude. Reviewing the Photo-Secessionist exhibition of 1907, the *New York Times* wrote of White: '. . . perhaps the most gifted of them all, surely the most unostentatious and most poetic. His work reveals a mind unusually sensitive to the glory of light . . .'

From 1907 until his death he was lecturer in photography at Columbia University, New York.

Richard Polak (1870-1957)

The Little Golfplayer 1913

Polak is known almost solely for his series of photographs, 'Figure Studies in Old Dutch Costume', published in 1915. These charming pastiches of seventeenth century Dutch masters, rendered in soft, delicate, platinum prints, form a tributary of the mainstream in 'High Art' photography as represented by Rejlander and Robinson. They are unequivocal attempts to recreate the artistic past, and while they were probably thought of as profanations of pictorial photography as the Photo-Secessionists conceived it, they were consistent with the precepts of earlier writers on photography. Any subject that could be done in painting, past or present, it was said, could be done in photography. The same laws that govern painters, wrote Robinson in the 1890s, govern photographers. The time may come, he asserted when the emotive subjects of earlier painters shall be successfully accomplished by photography.

Adolphe Disderi, the inventor of the *carte-de-visite* photograph in France, his enthusiasm for photography without bounds, wrote as early as 1862: Why shouldn't the photographer create compositions 'like the battle scenes of Salvator Rosa or the *kermesse* of Rubens; and may he not show interiors like those of van Ostade, of Peter de Hooch, of Chardin, of Granet; experiment with all kinds of *genre* compositions on the scale and in the taste of le Ducq, Terborch, the Teniers, or with the fantasies of Watteau and Diaz ?'
Several of Polak's contemporaries worked in the same idiom. Two photographers, Louis Guichard and Alexandre reconstituted Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* with the camera. Guido Rey, some of whose photographs are in the R.P.S. collection, made photographic reconstructions in almost any previous style. Depositions from the Cross, even, were produced, with all the appropriate props.

Edward J. Steichen (b.1879)

The Cat 1902

When rain fell on his lens and imparted an unusual quality of image to the photograph, Steichen, as a very young photographer, deliberately wet his lens afterwards to try to recapture the striking effects of the accident. Accidents often showed him the way. From the age of 16, when he bought his first second-hand Kodak, 'till 90, at which time he became freshly enchanted with simple things in nature, he was always alert to those little aberrations which distinguish between the ordinary and the marvellous.

Encouraged by Stieglitz who, in 1899, purchased one of his photographs, Steichen went to Paris in 1901 to study both painting and photography. While there he exhibited his photographs in the Paris Salon and had a one man show of photographs and paintings. He, too, teamed up with Stieglitz and others when Photo-Secession was formed in 1902 in a mission to establish photography as a creative and significant medium.

On his return from Paris Steichen opened a photographic portrait studio in New York.

During the first World War he served as chief of an army aerial photography unit, and in World War II he became head of all combat photography for the U.S. Navy. In the interceding years many of his most memorable portraits were made for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*: Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin, Carl Sandburg, Franklin Roosevelt, Lillian Gish. His new techniques in studio lighting and posing brought into greater prominence the whole field of fashion photography.

As curator of photography for the Museum of Modern Art since 1947, he created over 40 exhibitions. Most famous of them all was 'The Family of Man'. It had a phenomenal success. It was seen all over the world. An American visitor in Guatemala described how thousands of Indians came down from the hills, barefooted and on mules, to stand, transfixed, before those photographs.

Commenting in 1960 on the astounding effectiveness of this exhibition, Steichen said: 'The invention of photography gave visual communication its most simple, direct, universal language . . . it has become a force, and stands without a peer.'

Edward J. Steichen

Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966)

Trafalgar Square c. 1910

Coburn is among those photographers whose early training was in art. Strongly influenced by Whistler and Japanese prints, he tried to make his photographs as expressive and as meaningful as art. He too was a Photo-Secessionist, though not as purist-minded as Stieglitz. He believed in manipulating both the subject and the print; his works were often produced by handmade photogravure methods.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, he came to England in 1900 and exhibited at the London Salon. He settled down here and established a considerable reputation through several exhibitions, and by providing photographic illustrations for books by H. G. Wells, Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson. He published his own books of photographs on New York, London, and portraits of distinguished men.

George Bernard Shaw, an enthusiastic photographer himself, wrote the catalogue introduction to Coburn's 1906 exhibition, laying down some familiar exhortations about the photographer being freed from the mechanical drudgery and manual labour of the brush. Coburn went further and called for freedom of expression in photography itself. In 1913, he showed some startling photographs taken from unusually high viewpoints revealing the most unexpected patterns of form. Influenced by Cubism, he wanted photography to be as free for experimentation as were the other arts. An unlimited field was open to the camera, he said. Photography should be 'alive to the spirit of progress', should, as the newest of all the arts, be 'modern'. Like painters of the time, Coburn was intrigued with the startling images seen in photomicrographs.

In 1917 he produced his first 'Vortographs', the photographic expression of the Vorticist movement initiated by the poet Ezra Pound and the painter Wyndham Lewis. At the London Camera Club that year Coburn showed, along with 13 of his paintings, 18 of these startling prismatic images, the first 'abstract' photographs, producing a kind of infinity effect by shooting the subject through a triangle of mirrors.

Alvin Langdon Coburn

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